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AUTHORS AND AUTHORITIES: NON-SUPERIMPOSABLE IMAGES OF THE CLASSICS IN THE EUROPEAN NATIONAL TRADITIONS AND UNTRANSLATABILITY

The prevailing notion regarding the modern reception of Classical Antiquity is that "we (viz. participants in the Western tradition) all share a common cultural heritage". As regards translation between the various European languages, nations, and social groups which trace their literary traditions back to mutually shared sources and models, this preconception turns out to be not quite true and requires modification. Although we all like to refer back to a heritage based on the Classics, it appears that we have not all drawn to the same extent and from the same *loci* within the surviving corpus of the Classical legacy.[1]

To start with, our phonetic performance and rhetorical awareness of Latin and Greek differ from language to language and from country to country. The two Classical languages enjoy quite different ongoing linguistic relations with each of the modern languages. I was asked recently by a Polish scholar to translate his paper into English for an international Classics conference. It was on Latin prosody – anagrams, alliteration and onomatopoeia in Latin verse. But the comparative examples selected to illustrate his points were all drawn from Polish poetry, with two Russian poems thrown in. When I had finished the translation – Polish poems and all – it looked more like a discourse on Slavonic studies. Of course the English poetic tradition makes a much more comprehensive use of alliteration, but would replacing the Polish examples with English ones have carried across the author's intended message to the German, Italian, Dutch, Finnish etc. academics sitting in that conference room?

More importantly, each of the modern languages has built up its own store and tradition of selecting from the Classics, and this has by no means been uniform across the European languages and cultures. We do not all share in a universal, overlapping image of the Classics, but instead have our own national or community, endemic varieties of Classical heritage. Reception has been selective, depending on the specific historical circumstances of the recipient culture and the collective experiences of its members. This problem crops up time and again in practical translation, occasionally spoiling ambitious undertakings. The range of details it covers is vast, but here I will give just one instance, the Polish concepts of *respublica* and *antemurale* and their translation into modern English.

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[1] This paper is part of a larger cycle of work on untranslatability, cf. Bałuk-Ulewiczowa, 1996; and Bałuk-Ulewiczowa, 2000, for the hitherto published parts of the cycle.

I deliberately say "*Polish* concepts of *respublica* and *antemurale*". I hope to show how words and notions from an allegedly shared linguistic and cultural heritage may be diversely processed, adapted, and endowed with new symbolic meanings, in different recipient cultures and languages – until we no longer have an objective, universal knowledge of the Classics, but rather dwell each in our own national myth of Antiquity, snug – until we need to translate.

Respublica, "republic" – a familiar enough word to all, present in many languages; also a commonplace to all who have ever read a paragraph of Cicero. One of the most actively engaged humanist sleuths on the trail of the lost manuscript of Cicero's *de re publica* was the Pole Andrzej Patrycy Nidecki who in 1561 published a collection of excerpts he had managed to recover from quotes in other Classical texts (Nidecki 1561). Nidecki's interest was not coincidental: *respublica* was making a singular career in the macaronic-laden language of the Polish Sejm, in the printed books and broadsheets connected with legislature and parliamentary polemic, and in the mentality of their Sarmatian users. Hence the Slavonic calque, *rzeczpospolita*. The same linguistic process gave rise to an analogous derivative in English. Yet how very different was the connotative development of *commonwealth* and *commonweale*, under the Tudor, Stuart, and Hanoverian monarchs and during the Cromwell period; how utterly dissimilar its ascription to the political and cultural entity left in 1945 of the British Empire – from the history of *rzeczpospolita* in the periods before, during, and after the Partitions of Poland, its contemporary revival and proliferation, and the indelible if unrecognised vestiges in it of the Polish 16th-century political theory of the mixed state allegedly modelled on Plato, Aristotle and Polybius. When the respective direct loans, *republic* and *republika*, appeared, how diverse was their departure along separate paths from the earlier calques. In his political writings of the 1830's Adam Mickiewicz made a distinction between *rzeczpospolita* (often capitalised), which he used for his own, forfeited and mythologised country, and *republika* (with its derivative *republikanin*) usually for France.[2] When the writer Paweł Jasienica earned the contempt of First Secretary Gomułka for his historical books, which ultimately led to his premature death in 1975, a significant contributing factor to his fate was the title of one of his books, *Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów*, literally "the Republic of the Two Nations", an emotionally charged epithet referring to the union of Poland and Lithuania before the Partitions.[3]

Jasienica was only reviving an already existing phrase. This frequently occurring label baffles translators across the entire spectrum of skill and experience. A recent account of Polish 18th-century history by the historian Józef Andrzej Gierowski, translated into English by Harry Leeming, a senior academic of SSEES, University of London, contains the following variants: "a dual Commonwealth", "a dualist Commonwealth", "the Dual Republic", "the dual Commonwealth", "the Commonwealth of

[2] Mickiewicz, *Księgi narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* XIX (VI, 50), *O partii polskiej* (VI, 90–93), *O darze Polaków dla p. Lafitte* (VI, 106–107), *Konstytucja Trzeciego Maja* (VI, 118), *O bezpolitykowcach i o polityce „Pielgrzyma"* (VI, 121 – an exception to the rule of distinction), *O ludziach rozsądnych i o ludziach szalonych* (VI, 124), *Niezgody Emigracji naszej* (VI, 129), *O dążeniu ludów ku nowemu systematowi opodatkowania* (VI, 139), *Gazeta województwa szawelskiego* 1899 (VI, 148), *O projekcie dziennika francuskiego* (VI, 164–166), *Historia przyszłości* (translated from the French by Leon Płoszewski – VI, 181–196).

[3] For an English-language note see N. Davies, II 589, 605.

Poland-Lithuania", and "the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth" alongside "the Noblemen's Republic" and "the Noblemen's Commonwealth" for the related term *rzeczpospolita szlachecka*. The standard term on every page is "the Commonwealth", modified to "the Polish Commonwealth" for *Rzeczpospolita Polska* (e.g. p. 179). Despite the ubiquity of this rendering in the book, it is not the translator's fault that it fails to convey the emotional charge latent in the original term, just as it was not the author's fault that in his scholarly account he could not manage to suppress the subjective connotation, for want of another term or tradition in Polish historiography (Leeming 1996).

The second concept offers another, even more insurmountable obstacle to full translation. *Antemurale*, "bulwark" or "defensive structure", appears quite frequently in a multiplicity of texts in the phrase *antemurale Christianitatis* (alongside the alternative *propugnaculum Christianitatis*) "bulwark of Christendom", referring to the defensive role played by those countries along the civilisational border between the Christian and non-Christian (i.e. Muslim) world. So it is not an exclusively Polish monopoly; it has been (and sometimes still is being) applied to other countries, such as Hungary, Croatia, and other Balkan states.[4] The word itself goes back to Late Antiquity: the Forcellini Lexicon traces figurative usages to Jerome's translation of the Old Testament.[5] The Revised Version renders the two references as follows:

> In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and *bulwarks*. (Isaiah 26, 1)

And, more interestingly from our point of view:

> The Lord hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion: He hath stretched out a line, he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying: Therefore he made the *rampart* and the wall to lament; they languished together. (Lamentations 2, 8)

As I have already said, Poland was not the only state with the reputation of an *antemurale Christianitatis*. On 21st June 1526 Louis II of Hungary sent the last of three letters to Henry VIII entreating him in the name of God and for the salvation of the *respublica Christiana* to dispatch an auxiliary force to help him resist an imminent invasion by Soliman the Magnificent. The Hungarians were too weak to withstand the Turks without the assistance of other Christian princes. The late arrival of an auxiliary force would be as good as useless: the enemy would have managed to "thrust into the belly of our kingdom" (*dum hostis potentia in viscera hujus regni nostri penetraverit*).[6] Two months and eight days later, having received no help from his anointed Christian kindred, Louis and his army were slaughtered at the Battle of Mohacz (Mohacs).

Ironically enough, at the time of Mohacz Poland stood aside from the mortal conflict, even though Louis had close dynastic and family ties with the King of Poland.

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[4] A number of Croatian websites are to be found for *antemurale*. The word appears in the English-language version of the official address delivered by Pope John Paul II to the people of Croatia during his Balkan pilgrimage of 1994 (*During Ottoman inroads in Europe, Pope Leo X honoured the Croats by calling them "the strongest shield and the outer walls of Christianity" (Scutum saldissimum et antemurale christianitatis)*. Cf. Bibliography, K. Wojtyła.

[5] "Urbs fortitudinis nostrae Sion salvatur, ponetur in ea murus et antemurale" (Is. 26.1); "Luxitque antemurale, et murus pariter dissipatus est" (Thren. 2.8) (Forcellini, 298).

[6] Louis II of Hungary to King Henry VIII, (MS Cotton Vesp. F.III. fol.86) in Ellis, 1969. I Letter XCIV.

Although some Polish political writers would later deplore it in retrospect (Goślicki 1568: 4), at the time Poland was pursuing a policy of precarious peace with the Ottoman power, and even those 16th-century writers who engaged in anti-Turkish tracts – the controversialist Stanisław Orzechowski and the Habsburg agent Krzysztof Warszewicki – tended to couch their arguments in the language of pragmatic incitement to arms rather than in ideological catchphrases (Orzechowski 1543). The historians of literature who have addressed the subject, Sante Graciotti and Wiktor Weintraub, confirm the surprising observation that in 16th-century Poland the *antemurale* myth was neither widespread nor popular; and that it had been first introduced in the late 15th century by foreigners, the humanist *éminence grise* Filippo Buonaccorsi Callimacho and a nuncio representing Pope Pius II (Enea Silvio Piccolomini), in rather futile attempts to involve the Poles in an anti-Turkish league (Graciotti 1991: 61–78). While the historians Henryk Samsonowicz and Janusz Tazbir trace the Polish version of the myth back to 1319 and a petition to the Pope, they concede it was not an original Polish idea: the diplomatic phraseology was available in earlier Hungarian, Cypriot, and Venetian models (Samsonowicz 1995: 59; Tazbir 1987: 8, 2000).

It seems therefore that the myth of the Polish bulwark was not developed and disseminated until the 17th century, when relations with Turkey were changing, the Polish State was growing feebler, and other foes were becoming more ominous. All the time, however, nomadic Tartars, the Grand Turk's sometimes undisciplined, sometimes deliberately incited vassals, were making regular incursions of Poland's south-eastern border, wreaking havoc on the land of Podolia:

Eternal shame and harm beyond repair!
O, Pole! Podolia lieth wasted bare:
On Dnester sits the pagan to survey,
To reckon and divide his wretched prey.

The infidel unleashèd hath his hounds,
And woe! Thy fair dams and their young are bound
And carried off to distant slavery.
Alas! Ne'er more's thy hope them home to see!

For some 'cross Danube to the Turk are sold,
And others follow far a distant horde.
O, pity, Great God! Christian maids must spread
For heathen lords the sheets on sinful beds.

The hand of vicious thief hath us put down;
He, ignorant of village and of town,
Doth but with wand'ring tent the country scour
And us, the weak, with quenchless lust devour.

The preying wolf doth pillage and doth kill
The lambs of flocks forsaken to his will,
When neither shepherd to the flocks attends,
Nor e'en his watchful dogs to guard them sends.[7]

[7] Translation by T. Bałuk-Ulewiczowa 2000: 40–43.

For Wiktor Weintraub, the original poem by Jan Kochanowski is "probably the most passionate and vehemently expressive piece of Polish Renaissance poetry" (Weintraub 1980: 927). I don't think the above translation does justice to the original's level of emotionality, again not entirely through any shortcoming on the part of the translator. If in the Polish verse "the inroad is presented as a disaster and a disgrace crying out for vengeance" (Weintraub 1980: 927) the best the translator can hope to do is to tell an exotic story, but one in which the extraneous recipient is guaranteed armchair security against the menace and shame carried by the original and targeted at contemporary readers.

The myth does not appear to have blossomed fully until disaster had finally struck – after the dismemberment of Poland-Lithuania. In 1833 Mickiewicz was deploring the looting of Poland's libraries and addressing the French in a campaign to establish a Polish library in Paris (Mickiewicz 1950, VI, 177–180). He employed the *antemurale* argument. Only by this time the bulwark had fallen – to a Russian assailant. Over a century later, in the aftermath of Yalta and enforced exile, a group of Polish historians who found themselves on the Western side of the Iron Curtain set up a scholarly periodical for international historical research entitled *Antemurale*. In the editorial introduction to Volume One, published 1954, they envisaged contributions would be in the "internationally ambient languages", French, Italian and Latin. But they did not find it necessary to give any kind of explanation for their choice of a title (*Antemurale*).

Forty-seven years later, a decade after the restoration of freedom and full independence, website pages compiled by Polish Americans were carrying the following information:

> The wars of the 17th century enhanced the religious feelings of the Catholic majority in the Republic. Those wars were waged against the neighbors of different religious rites – against Orthodox Russia, Protestant Sweden and Muslim Turkey. The opinion about Poland being the bulwark [antemurale] of Christianity became widely popular (*A Brief History of Poland*, 1994).
>
> During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Christian inhabitants of southeast Europe lived in perpetual fear of Muslim invasion. Tartar raiding parties laid waste to the countryside, abducting captives for slaves and ransom; Turkish occupation meant at the least pillage, sacrilege and extortion. For both Turk and Tartar the sole purpose of waging war was material gain. The Muslim invasion routes were through either the Danube Valley to the walls of Vienna, or through the Moldavian plain and southern Poland. Much of the Turkish effort was directed against Poland, whose heroic resistance earned her the name "propugnaculum Christianitatis" the bulwark of Christianity.[8]

We may ask who, apart from Polish Americans, is expected to read such messages, and how much they may mean to such individuals – all of them, presumably, free of the personal experience of the peril couched in this kind of terminology. Or perhaps not...?

The writer who overshadowed the Romantics and what they did to popularise the Polish *antemurale* myth was undoubtedly Henryk Sienkiewicz, both with his 17th-century *Trilogy* and in *Quo Vadis*, the novel set in Proto-Christian Rome. It is perhaps

[8] Lysiak; another contemporary historian (Niendorf) writes, "Im 17. Jahrhundert, als Einfluß und Ansehen der Monarchie im Rückgang begriffen waren, verstand sich der gesamte Adel Polen-Litauens als ein 'Antemurale Christianitatis' (Eine Entsprechung also zu dem 'Christus diligit Francos')".

symptomatic of the times and their demands of translators that in the early 1990's a group of commercially-minded Americans had a new – profoundly adapted but expanded – translation of Sienkiewicz's *With Fire and Sword* made, published, and distributed in the United States (Segel 1991). Kuniczak's translation, advertised as a "Polish *Gone With The Wind*", was duly rapped by critics for its unrestrainedly liberal approach to the original. But can you successfully market nostalgia, roots, and a sense of identity, and at the same time tell the world a story hermetically enclosed within its own mythology?

> "Having left Chreptiów in the afternoon, they rode on until evening, and then the entire night, and by the next day, also in the afternoon, they could see the lofty rocks of Kamieniec. At this sight, and also of the stronghold's bastions and roundels crowning the rocks, their hearts were filled with a great feeling of encouragement. It seemed unlikely that any other but the hand of God could ever pull down that eagle's nest perched on those steep crags encircled by a loop in the river. It was a beautiful summer's day, and the spires of Greek and Latin churches peeped out from behind the crags like huge candles. The bright land was full of peace, serenity, and cheerfulness".

That's how Sienkiewicz – in another translation, dated 1998 – described the last peaceful moments of Podolia's mightiest fortress, the gate into the Commonwealth. The stage was set for the tragedy. In 1672 the invincible stronghold fell to the Turk (Bałuk-Ulewiczowa 1998: 58).

But he could not have foreseen the future – either of his subject-matter or of his story. He could not have foreseen the cumulative effects on reader reaction of the history to come, which let him accomplish his objective of "warming hearts" far more enduringly than he could have ever wished for. Though only in his native land and language. Outside it his intimately domestic appeal turns into "a Polish *Gone With The Wind*". The core of his message, the warming of hearts, may at best transform into a strange and wonderful tale, but its essence remains intrinsically untranslatable – giving rise to many an insurmountable problem for the translator, engaged for the purveyance of the myth of Antiquity to modern dreamers.

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Postscript – after September 11th, 2001

Sienkiewicz's message in the American translation of *The Trilogy* may indeed be assuming functions and transformations he could never have foreseen...

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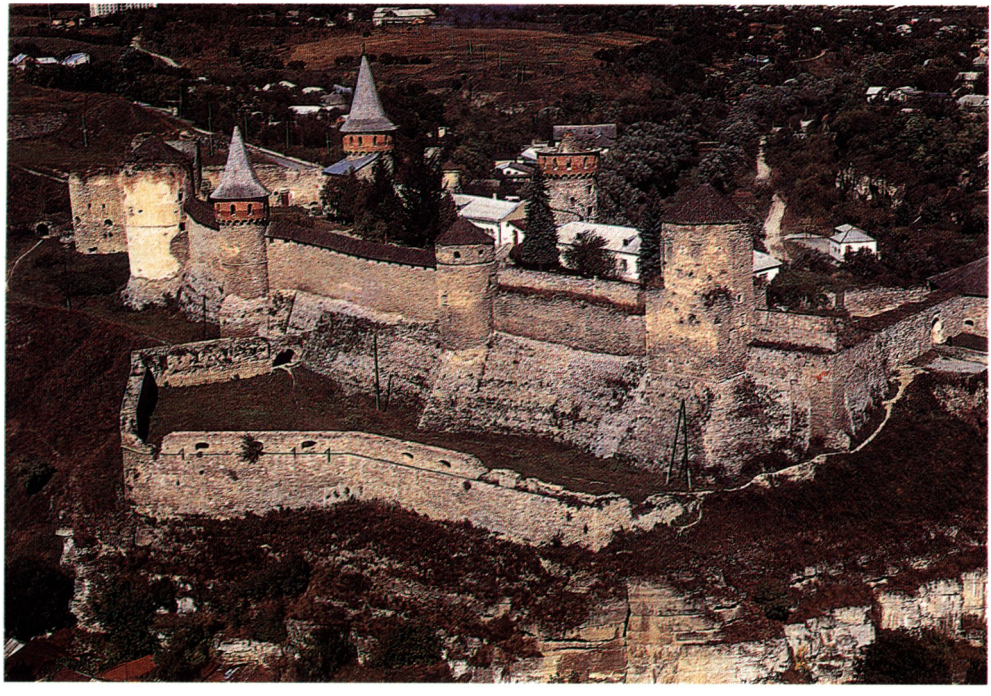
Brzeżany

Chocim



Kamieniec Podolski

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